

Keeping Your Yard & Garden Off The Menu:



WAYS TO "DEER-PROOF" YOUR PROPERTY

By *Coleen Vansant*, Public Information Manager, Alabama Forestry Commission

Most landowners who live out in the county or outskirts of town have at least one story to tell about deer. They saw a deer do this or that as it made its way across their property, or they tell of the big buck standing at the edge of the field, or the doe as she brought her fawns to the creek to drink. Most of the stories are good ones – treasured memories that make you smile to yourself when you think of them.

Then there are the other landowners who have the stories that are not so pleasant. The stories about the deer that ate all of the blooms off of the heirloom rose bush, the pair that pulled all of the clothes off the line, or the pea patch that was destroyed in a single night. These are the ones you want to forget and hopefully never experience again.

If you have trouble with deer coming to the dinner table in your flowerbeds or garden, there are a few inexpensive things that you can do to deter or even repel them from the places you don't want them. If they have already made themselves at home at your place, you will have a harder time getting rid of them.

To succeed in discouraging deer from visiting your house, you have to know a little about deer. The first thing is that deer need a habitat with three basic elements to survive: water, food, and shelter. Deer prefer areas along "the edge" – the space along the edge of the forest, fence row, or roadside where they can eat or browse in the open but have the safety of the cover close by. They require about 7 pounds of food and 2-4 quarts of water a day. Deer will eat about 500 different kinds of plants, although they are similar to us – they have certain foods that are their favorites, and when food is abundant they will search for the things that tickle their taste buds. Also as with humans, they will leave the things alone that they dislike, the things that smell or taste bad. When food is scarce they will eat anything.

Deer are most active during the hours of early morning and evening. They are ruminants (they chew their cud to digest their food) and bed down in sheltered areas most of the day to do this. Deer tend to find shelter in old-growth forests, low overhanging trees, dense shrubs, tall grass fields, fencerows, and young pine plantations.

They like lush green gardens with tender new shoots of grasses and plants. Deer particularly have a taste for agricultural crops such as wheat, alfalfa, clover, beans, corn, and peas. Fruit trees are tops on their list, both the fruit and the young tender leaves. They will stand on their hind legs and strip a tree of its fruit as high as they can reach. During the winter months their diets usually consist of acorns and other things such as lichen, dead leaves, twigs, bark, and evergreen limbs.

Some of their favorite things that may be in your yard or garden are peas, beans, and other legumes (nitrogen-fixed plants), apples, peaches, strawberries, tulips, and pansies. They usually won't eat things that smell or taste bad, plants with a milky bitter sap, prickly or spiny things, tough plants, or plants with stiff needles. Deer are less likely to eat daisies, wisteria, yarrow, daffodils, geraniums and most of the aromatic herbs such as oregano, lavender, and thyme. If the food supply is good in a particular area they will usually revisit it again and again.

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Crepe Myrtle



Zinnia



Wild Phlox



Columbine



Clematis



Lantana



Daffodil



Eastern Hemlock

There are many simple and inexpensive ways to keep the local deer from turning your yard into the best restaurant in town. All of these home remedies attack their senses of smell, taste, sound, and sight, or target their natural instinct to flee.



Choosing the Right Plants

If your yard is already established or if you are doing new landscaping, keep in mind there are different tricks you can do with plants. The number one thing to remember when selecting plants for your flower beds or vegetable garden is that deer are less likely to eat what is offensive to their noses or taste buds.

If you have existing plants that happen to be favored by deer, you can cut down on the likelihood of their finding them if you surround them with plants that they don't like. For instance, plant baby's breath with roses (roses are deer candy). Not only will it make a beautiful visual combination and be good for cutting a

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Deer Resistant Trees and Plants (Rarely or occasionally browsed)		
Trees	Quince	Garlic*
Ash	Rhodendron	Geranium
Black gum	Rose of Sharon	Grape Hyacinth
Black locust	Sweet shrub	Holly hocks
Box elder	Trumpet vine	Iris
Dogwood	Wisteria	Lambs ear
Eastern red cedar		Lavender*
Magnolia	Plants & Bulbs	Marigold
Maples (<i>most species</i>)	Aster	Mint (<i>most species</i>)*
Mimosa	Baby's breath	Morning glory
Oak (<i>most species</i>)	Bachelor's button	Onion*
Persimmon	Bee balm	Oregano*
Pine (<i>ornamentals</i>)	Black-eyed Susan	Peony
Sassafras	Blanket flower	Petunia
Spruce	Bleeding heart	Phlox
Sweet gum	Cactus	Red-hot poker
	Calendula	Rosemary
Shrubs & Climbers	Calla lily	Sage (<i>most species</i>)*
Boxwood	Cannas	Salvia
Butterfly bush	Chives*	Shasta daisy
Clematis	Colombine	Snapdragon
Crepe myrtle	Daffodil	Tarragon
English ivy	Dalai	Thrift
Forsythia	Delphinium	Thyme*
Holly	Dianthus – Pink	Verbena
Hydrangea	Dill*	Vinca
Jasmine (<i>most species</i>)	Dusty Miller	Yarrow*
Juniper	Echinacea	Wild ginger
Lantana	Fern	Zinnia
Lilac	Forget-me-not	
Mountain laurel	Foxglove	

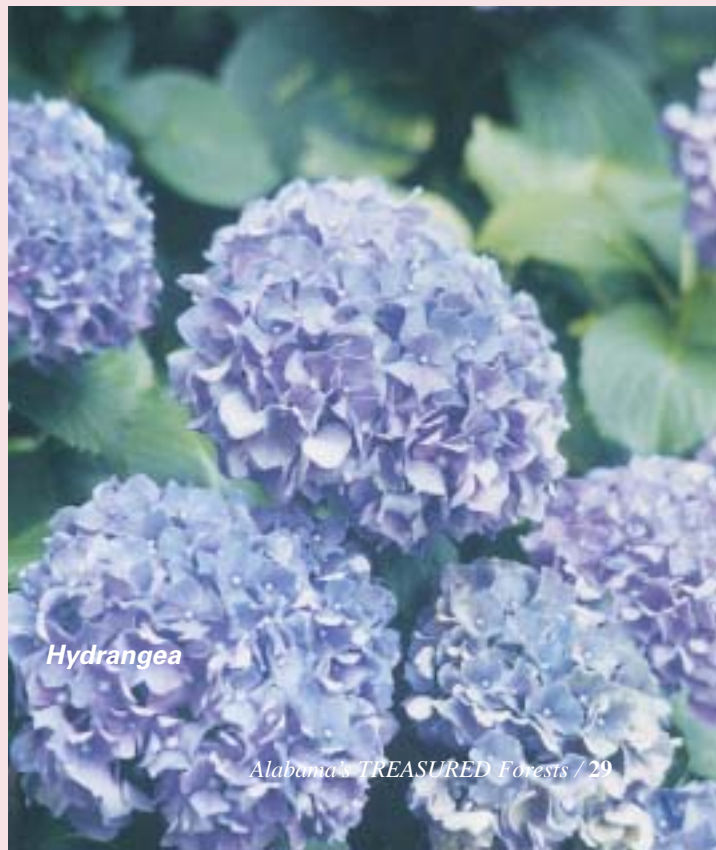
* considered the best deer repellents

bouquet, but the baby's breath is not a deer favorite – they will be less likely to browse the rose buds if they have to go through the baby's breath to get to them.

Plant things deer prefer in the back of your flowerbeds, and plant fragrant flowering herbs such as sage, lavender, and rosemary along the outer edges. The strong smell of the herbs may keep the deer from stepping further into the flowerbed to eat your azaleas. Disguise a spring tulip bed by dotting it with plants such as thyme or creeping phlox.

In your vegetable garden you might save your corn

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Hydrangea

Ways to “Deer-Proof” Your Property

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and peas if you plant a row of zinnias, asters, bachelor’s button, or cosmos (or a mixture of all) on either side. Or you may want to consider planting aromatic herbs, onions, garlic, or marigolds along the outer edges of the garden, while planting beans, peas, and other deer-delectable items on the interior. It will not hurt to mix a deterrent plant or grouping of them sporadically throughout the garden.

If you have a bird bath, garden pond, or fountain in your yard that would serve as a source of water for thirsty deer, you may wish to consider placing it in a setting of various blooming bulbs and plants that deer don’t find appetizing. Place among daffodils, cannas, iris, and other plants that will provide blooms from early spring to late fall. A variety of plants may keep deer from drinking from your birdbath or fountain.

Trying Home Remedies

Most home remedies work for a time, but eventually deer will become accustomed to unusual sights, smells, or sounds if they are exposed to them long enough. They will walk over it or through it to get to a favorite food. It is best to rotate your tactics and devices periodically so they won’t become accustomed to the deterrent.

Sprinklers and floodlights – Hook sprinklers and floodlights to a motion sensor. Deer will flee when the bright light magically shines or when they are suddenly sprayed with water.

Fishing line – String a strand of deep-sea fishing line around what you don’t want eaten at a height of about three feet. It is said that deer bump into the invisible line and instantly retreat to safety. Be sure to mark the line with flagging or cloth so that you won’t get caught in your own trap.

Fabric softener/moth balls/human hair –

Hang fabric softener strips or cheesecloth bags filled with mothballs or human hair around the yard at varying heights. The unpleasant smells will deter deer from the area.

Soap – Drill holes in bars of scented soap, tie a piece of fishing line through them, then tie onto fences, bushes, and tree limbs. Soaps with a tallow base work best.

Garlic – Fill cheesecloth bags or sections of nylon panty hose with crushed garlic. Hang at varying heights around what you want to save.

White Flags – A raised tail on a white-tailed deer is a signal to other deer to run like heck. You can mimic this alarm system by tying white flags round your garden and yard. Tear old t-shirts, cloths, etc. into strips about one foot long and tie them at different places around your yard. You might even want to tie several clothesline-style on fishing line around the edge of your garden. This works best with a little wind that will make the “tails” move.

Noise – A string of tin cans, pie pans fluttering and shining in the breeze, or even the tinkling of wind chimes or bells can help deter deer from your flowerbeds and garden. Play a radio in the yard periodically, or connect it to a timer that will go on and off at dusk and dawn.

Remember, in order for these “scare tactics” to work, you have to change them up from time to time.

Plants that Deer Prefer

Trees

(both fruiting & ornamental)

Apple
Cherry
Cypress
Crab Apple
Eastern Red Bud
Peach
Pear
Plum

Shrubs

Juniper
Rhododendron
Azalea
Yew
Burning Bush

Flowers & plants

Beans
Blackberry
Broccoli
Cantaloupe
Cauliflower
Chrysanthemum
Daylilies
Hosta
Lettuce
Pansies
Peas
Roses
Spring Bulbs
Strawberries
Sweet Corn
Trillium
Tulips
Watermelon

A Dog - If you live in the country and are not restricted by leash laws, the best deterrent you can have is a dog running loose in your yard. Besides humans, dogs are the number one predator of deer. Having Rover or Spot on guard may be the best answer to your problem.

Another way that deer can damage or destroy trees is rubbing on them. During the fall, bucks will rub their antlers aggressively to remove the velvet covering. The constant vigorous rubbing will remove the bark from the tree. This can be remedied by installing a protective wrap or fence around the tree or by using several of the home remedies mentioned above. ☹

Author’s note: If you have any remedies that have deterred deer on your property please share them. You can send them to me at vansantc@forestry.state.al.us.

Resources:

http://www.hgtv.com/hgtv/gl_wildlife_other/article/

Henning, E., J. Kelly, K. Kyles, N. Allen. *Reduce Deer Damage in Your Yard*. EC1577, Oregon State University Extension Service, 2002.

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http://www.gardengatemagazine.com/basics/g21_deer2.html

<http://gardening.about.com/library/hotto/htdeer.htm>

<http://www.cayugalandscape.com/gardencenter/deerresistant.html>

Hart, Rhonda Massingham. *Deer Proofing Your Yard and Garden*. North Adams, Massachusetts: Storey Publishing, 1997.